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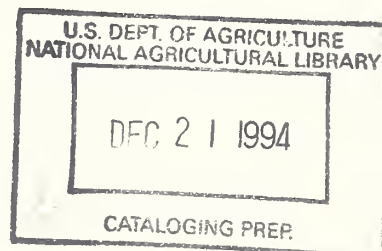
THE EXTENSION NATIONAL AUDIOCONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
An Experiment Using Videotapes and Telephone Hook-Ups

by

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Prepared for symposium, "An Emerging National Extension/Research System and Impact of New Communication Technology," American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting, Michigan State University, August 2-5, 1987.

**United States
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Agriculture**



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THE EXTENSION NATIONAL AUDIOCONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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Beth Walter Honadle* and William R. Gillis**

In May 1987 the Cooperative Extension System held a national training conference on economic development. Nearly 500 Extension staff from thirty-three States participated in the event. This conference differed from traditional in-service educational workshops in that the participants were scattered all over the country--from Alaska to Florida to California to New Hampshire.¹

The conference utilized a combination of communications technologies to deliver an educational program to extension staffs nationwide. Participants were given handbooks in advance of the workshop. A three-part videotape was shown to extension audiences during the workshop. The workshop culminated in an hour and forty-five minute audioconference in which workshop sites were networked using a telephone bridging system. Sites were instructed to call-in to the conference at a scheduled time. In effect, it was a very large conference call in which sites employed speaker phones at each site to enable large parties to "listen in" on the conversation.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and assess the Extension experience and to draw some conclusions regarding further applications of the videotape and audioconference method. We begin with a discussion of the educational objectives for the conference and an analysis of alternatives considered for achieving those objectives.

Objectives

The conference committee had several objectives. One was to make Extension staffs aware of the complex trends and forces affecting the rural economy. The intent was to communicate knowledge about social, demographic, economic, and institutional phenomena having an effect on rural economies. This included such important trends and issues as the aging of the population, the importance of nonagricultural industry to rural development, and the interdependence between rural America and the Nation and the world as a whole. These factors affect youth, families, businesses (farm and nonfarm), governments, and communities. In short, they have impacts on all of Extension's clientele. The message needed to reach Extension staffs from all disciplines because they all have important roles to play in economic development.

A second objective was to educate the Extension system about economic development. The objective here was to develop a short-course, if you will, on the goals, theories, and strategies of economic development. We were attempting to provide a very basic understanding of how a local economy functions and strategies that communities can undertake to invigorate their economic condition. This objective requires at least a rudimentary comprehension of the theory behind the strategies.

The third objective was to develop an educational package that could be used by Extension staffs with their clientele. That is, we perceived a need

for materials that Extension educators can use with groups such as chambers of commerce, local development organizations, local government officials, and others to help decisionmakers fulfill their economic development responsibilities.

In addition to these three main objectives, there were secondary purposes of influencing four-year plans of work, demonstrating extension's capabilities in economic development, and other lesser objectives.

Alternatives

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with all of the alternatives one might consider for achieving these objectives. Following is an analysis of three of the leading alternatives. First is a traditional conference in which presenters and participants travel to one location, listen to presenters, engage in question-and-answer sessions with presenters, and mix and mingle with their colleagues. Second is a video satellite conference in which presentations are broadcast to locations around the country that elect to participate in the program, and are able to downlink it. Third is an audio-only teleconference combined with videotapes. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the three alternatives considered. A brief discussion of their relative merits is presented below.

The Traditional Approach

Traditional conferences have the advantage of bringing large groups of people together for face-to-face interaction. They are well-suited for building networks, informal discussions, and getting professionals away from the office long enough to focus their attention on something other than the latest brushfire. On the other hand, traditional conferences are costly in terms of travel expenses and unproductive time spent traveling. The result is that fewer potential participants may attend a "traditional" conference. Since presentations are given "live", traditional conferences have the advantage of being able to present timely material. However, proceedings are notoriously slow in being produced and delivered after a conference has been held. Moreover, unless sessions are audio recorded or videotaped, there is no lasting audiovisual product of a conference to share with Extension clientele.

Video Satellite Conference

Video satellite conferences are most appropriate when the material to be presented is newsworthy, and needs to be delivered, live, to large numbers of people for great impact. Examples would be conferences scheduled to coincide with a major event such as announcement of trade legislation, a tax law change, or other very timely happening. Secondly, satellite conferences can lessen the need for long-distance travel for participants and presenters, especially if the "receive" sites are well located. Third, they can be designed to be interactive, so that all of the communication is not one-way (presenter to audience). However, video satellite hook-ups can be more expensive. All potential sites may not have ready access to the necessary facilities for downlinking the conference or the funds to absorb downlink costs. If the uplink-downlink costs were to be shared equally among sites,

smaller groups would probably avoid the conference because of the high per-participant charge. Unless the conference is recorded, the material may not be repeatable for staff who had to be absent for the conference or for clientele outside Extension who could benefit from the presentations. Satellite conferences are the most vulnerable to technological glitches of the three alternatives. The probability of a sustained power outage at a traditional conference is fairly small. The chance of a tape breaking or of playback equipment not working properly at a videotape and audioconference workshop are quite small (especially if site coordinators check out the equipment ahead of time), telephones are rather reliable, and videotape playback equipment is generally available. Contrast this with the possibility of a problem occurring when one or more of the sites fails to make contact with the incoming conference. This is not to suggest that such chances should never be taken. Rather, the point is that one should only take that chance when necessary such as when the material is very newsworthy, as was mentioned earlier.² The implication for anyone considering this approach is that live, satellite videoconferences take considerable time in planning, pre-production and networking downlink sites. Appendix 1 gives tips to help a decisionmaker know whether a satellite videoconference is the best alternative.

Videotape and Audioconference Method

This alternative shares several advantages with the video satellite approach. Namely, it alleviates the need for participants to travel long distances to attend the meeting. The major expense is the production of the videotape itself, which can be offset by the fact that the tapes can have multiple uses. Videotapes compare less favorably with traditional face-to-face conferences or video satellite conferences in terms of their ability to communicate up-to-the-minute information. However, this potential disadvantage is not without compensation. First, if the material to be presented is not particularly perishable (such as the leading theories and strategies of economic development), then the fact that videotapes are produced and distributed ahead of time is irrelevant. Second, the telephone audioconference permits ample opportunities for updating changes in case studies and other material on the videotape that might have changed since it was produced. A distinct advantage of the videotape approach is that videotapes are easily reproduced and can be used over and over for future in-service workshops, for education of clientele, and for secondary purposes such as marketing Extension programs. This is also true of video satellite conferences but not traditional conferences. Also, the ability to interact via telephone conference call makes this alternative as interactive as the video satellite approach. Obviously, face-to-face conferences offer the most opportunity for interaction. But, often time is wasted. Some sessions are more valuable than others. Teleconferencing is brief, concise, and lets you focus in on targeted subjects with targeted people.

In summary, there are trade-offs among the various alternatives discussed here. They must be weighed before deciding which approach is best suited for one's objectives. It is important, therefore, that one's objectives are clear at the outset. This will guide one's selection of the most appropriate alternative. So-called "distance learning" approaches can never supplant the



need for traditional conferences any more than the videotape-plus-teleconference approach can do everything a video satellite conference can do and vice versa.

The Economic Development Audioconference Case

This section presents specific information about the Extension National Audioconference on Economic Development. We must emphasize that the budgetary data are specific to this case and should not be used to help others estimate the cost of their planned project.

Budget

The videotape (75 copies), 2500 participant's handbooks, and 100 site facilitator's manuals cost approximately \$32,000. This figure includes approximately \$26,000 for the three-part videotape³, \$2,500 for participants' manuals, \$200 for site facilitator's manuals, and \$3,500 for instructional design and coordination.

The telephone audioconference cost the Extension Service-U.S. Department of Agriculture \$318 (\$198 for 33 phone lines on the teleconference bridge, plus \$110 for 5 long distance calls and \$10 for audio recording the conference call).⁴ We do not have figures on indirect costs such as the personnel costs associated with the National Program Leader for Economic Development's time, her secretary's time, and that of others without whose effort this conference could not have taken place.

The same material could have been presented, live, in a satellite conference broadcast simultaneously to sites around the country. However, we would have incurred the fixed costs of the videotapes and manuals in either case. For comparison, if we had conducted a video satellite conference instead, it could have cost approximately \$500 an hour⁵ to uplink the conference to a satellite. The tapes run about two hours, plus we had an hour and forty-five minute audioconference. Also, we would have had to pay about \$1000 per panelist to connect them via satellite to the central production facility (approximately two hours per person times the five panelists who were not already at the facility). Alternatively, we could have brought them all together to be uplinked from one site. So, on the one hand, we are talking about approximately \$12,000 to uplink panelists from Washington State, Pennsylvania (two panelists were there at the time of the audioconference), Georgia, Wisconsin, and Washington, DC. On the other, we are talking about additional travel costs of perhaps \$2,500. All this would have added to the conference is the ability of the participants to see the panelists speak.

The cost to individual States varied, depending on the number of staff attending and their location within the State. In some States, only university-based staff participated. Others drew participants from locations throughout the State. Several States arranged multiple locations. One State hosted a four-state conference to view and discuss the videotapes. The direct costs to the Cooperative Extension Services were travel and meals. While precise figures are not available, we estimate an average State cost per extension participant to be approximately \$50 per person. State costs

associated with travel to a satellite conference would be approximately the same as for other alternatives.

Whether we had a videotape-plus-audioconference event or a satellite conference, we still had to produce the supplementary videotape. With the satellite conference we might have avoided making as many copies of the tape, but that is not certain. Clearly, the videotape-plus-audioconference approach is much less expensive.

Evaluation

The site facilitators' manuals contained two evaluation forms, the "Site Facilitator's Report" and "Participant's Evaluation." The facilitators' reports will be used to give us general feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop. The participant's evaluations will be used to gather more specific information about how the audience rates various portions of the videotape, the handbooks they received prior to the workshop, and the audioconference. Appendix 2 contains copies of these forms.

It is too early to summarize the evaluations. At this writing just over one-third of the sites have returned their evaluations. However, we can relate some of the comments we have received on the forms that have been returned so far.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that, regardless of how participants rated various components of the conference, there was a consensus that "Overall, I am glad I attended this conference." How strongly sites agreed with this statement varied, but most were in the "agree" to "strongly agree" range. In part, this appears to be due to the fact that, for many participants, this was a new experience. They reported that they really liked being able to see what other States are doing in the economic development area and to hear about other States' programs via the audioconference.

The comments we are receiving largely address three areas: the content of the material presented, the videotape presentation style, and the audioconference itself. The most popular part of the videotape appears to have been the case studies. They seem to have given participants good ideas for their own programs. The most negative criticisms of the content of the videotape came from participants for whom the material was not new. Of course, the case studies are original, so they were new to everyone. Participants who are specialists in economic development already (not surprisingly) found the overview and theories and strategies segments of the videotape to be very basic. On the other hand, the majority of participants found the content of those segments to be "beneficial." Thus, participants' appreciation of the content was directly related to their prior exposure to the subject matter covered. Fortunately, the conference generally confirmed our assumption that there was a need in the System for some basic training in economic development.

The videotape presentation style was well-received generally. The one consistent (although by no means unanimous) criticism was that the part of the tape containing the theories and strategies of economic development was not interesting enough. By and large, participants were pleased with the content

of the segment, but they found it too long (thirty-seven minutes) and visually uninteresting. The approach used was to have an Extension expert in economic development present the content (which had been outlined beforehand) in a question and answer mode with an informal group of Extension agents. This instructional technique was used for several reasons. First, cost was an important consideration. A "talking head" is relatively inexpensive to tape. Second, the content lent itself to more of a talking mode. There are real limits to how to visualize a lecture about concepts, theories and strategies. Third, one objectives was to have the economic development "expert" answer questions the audience would be likely to ask, so this format was a reasonable attempt to do that. And so, an informal discussion type of setting was seen as preferable to a simple lecture, which would have been lethal to the audience.

Although we used the talking head approach (in one part of the tape only) for good reasons, if we had more money and an opportunity to do that segment of the tape differently we would make the following modifications. First, we would shorten it by roughly twenty minutes. This might be accomplished by eliminating the questions and having the expert present the answers only. Second, we would insert film footage to illustrate some of the points and to break up the monotony. Third, we would insert visuals such as character-generated graphics to summarize key points in the form of checklists. This third modification would also enable us to shorten the overall segment on the principle that "one picture is worth a thousand words." It really would help to reinforce the points and to leave a visual impression on the audience's collective mind.

The audioconference itself generally lent a feeling of excitement or engagement to the conference participants. In part, it was because it was a new experience for some of them. Many expressed positive feelings about being able to hear what their counterparts from around the country had to say. This is a very rare opportunity for most Extension staffs and a nonexistent one for many who never get to travel to conferences outside their States.

A small number of participants made one of the following observations. First, for States that have a lot of experience doing audioconferences this was "old hat," so one State would have preferred more sophisticated teleconferencing using satellite communication. Again, we did not have the funds required to put on a video satellite conference and many sites would not have been able to participate in a satellite conference. Also, there was really no need for video on the teleconference since all that would be gained is the sight of the heads doing the talking. Instead, sites were provided handouts with pictures of the panelists (See Appendix 3). Second, a small number of participants felt that there were too many sites participating in the audioconference and suggested breaking it into two groups (eastern and western U.S.) next time. This view is more than balanced by the larger number of participants who were enthusiastic about the opportunity to hear from other regions of the country about their concerns and programs. Also, it would place more of an imposition on the panelists for them to go through two audioconferences. This would also add to scheduling problems associated with coordinating six panelists twice. Another factor, we must admit, is that no one anticipated that as many States would sign up as did. It is a clear

indication of the high level of interest in economic development at this point in time that as many States and as many participants took part in the program.

A third observation (in various forms) was that the technique of calling on sites in turn so that each site could ask at least one question of the panelists could have been substituted with a better one. However, there was no consensus among participants expressing that general view as to how it could have been done better. One suggested breaking the audioconference into topic areas. This might have worked well. However, we had no way of knowing until the conference was held what topics people would be most interested in discussing. As it turned out, some sites asked process questions (e.g., What barriers did your Extension Service encounter in implementing your economic development project? Who should be involved? How did you get them involved?, and so on). Other sites were more interested in substantive issues. In short, it would have been hard for the organizers of the audioconference to anticipate the interests of the participants. The other issue concerned the equity of letting some States ask one or more questions, while others would never be able to ask one. There is no question that the technique of calling on sites in order is the most efficient in terms of time. That is one of the leading reasons we chose it.

Again, although the decision to manage the audioconference as we did was for good reasons, it does not mean that we would necessarily conduct subsequent audioconferences in this way. As a matter of fact, the audioconference really gave us a good sense of what is on people's minds, so designing future audioconferences along topical lines would be much easier.

Summary and Conclusions

The videotape-plus-audioconference approach to staging a national Extension workshop on economic development met our objectives reasonably well. It was cost-effective, communicated the message, and left behind materials (videotapes and handbooks) the Extension Services and others can use to educate themselves and clients about economic development. We would like to emphasize that this was the best approach for the purposes at the time, but face-to-face and satellite conferences are just as appropriate when they are used properly.

We also learned a lot about "distance learning" approaches in the process of developing these materials and holding the audioconference. One lesson is that, whatever material you present or whatever educational technology you use, some participants will express the view that the material is not new to them. However, as organizers of such an event you can console yourself if the results of your evaluation indicate that most participants indicate that the material was just right in terms of content, level, and so forth.

Second, since only one participant had a negative comment about the timing of the audioconference, we conclude that late afternoon in the East is a good time to hold a national conference. Ours was scheduled for 3:30-5:00 p.m. eastern time, so that western States could participate at a reasonable time.

Third, most of the feedback we received indicated that the lead time we gave site facilitators to preview the materials, plan and promote their workshops, distribute the handbooks, and other administrative details was good. Most States received their materials about one month in advance. Appendix 4 contains a how-to sheet giving this and other tips based on our experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to gratefully acknowledge Betty Fleming, Coordinator, USDA Teleconference Center, Video and Film Division, and Michael J. Albright, Coordinator for Instructional Development, Media Resources Center, Iowa State University for their thoughtful comments on an earlier draft. We accept responsibility for the final product.

NOTES

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FOOTNOTES

¹The conference sites were in Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania (with participants from New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland), South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. In addition, one panelist was from Wisconsin.

²There are four criteria that justify a satellite course, but we think there is enough similarity of purpose to cite them here:(1) visualization through video technology is valuable to the audience(2) the number of receiving sites, frequency of video transmission or time sensitivity of material makes the distribution of videotapes impractical, (3) use of satellite is more cost efficient than a terrestrial system or a terrestrial system is not available, and 4) the budget permits a satellite conference.

From: Michael J. Albright, "A Conceptual Framework for a University Level Course Delivered by Communications Satellite," Ph.D. dissertation, Iowa State University, in progress. Note, however, that these criteria are meant for a college course and not a one-shot conference.

³The videotape runs a total of one hour and forty-one minutes. One segment required filming in four locations (Washington State, Georgia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania). The producer was Media Resources Center, Iowa State University. For comparison, another videotape's costs would vary because of such factors as film length, number of locations and associated travel costs, and vendor prices.

⁴For a variety of reasons, this conference required calling-out to certain sites and participants rather than their calling-in to the bridge (hence, the 5 long distance calls.)

⁵This is an estimated figure provided by Media Resources Center, Iowa State University.





Teleconference Tips

SHOULD I DO A LIVE, SATELLITE VIDEOCONFERENCE?

WHAT DOES IT COST?

May 1987

YOUR OBJECTIVE

A live, satellite videoconference, no matter how it is sent or delivered to your target audience, is more expensive than other forms of teleconferencing, such as audioconferencing, audioconferences plus videotapes at every site, computer conferencing, etc. When is it cost effective? When is it truly needed? Here are some questions to think about, as you decide:

VISUAL NEEDS

- 1) What is your communications/training objective? What do you want people to do as a result of your conference?
- 2) Are there visual communication/training needs? What are they? Could they be accomplished by alternative means (handouts, videotapes, slides, computer graphics, overhead transparencies, etc.?) If there are no real action-oriented visual needs, would an audioconference, plus alternative visuals at every site be the answer? And, if there are no visual needs of any kind, wouldn't an easy, quick-to-arrange, cost-effective audioconference be the right approach?

TWO-WAY AUDIO?

- 3) Does the conference need to be interactive? In other words, do you need two-way audio or sound capability from many, perhaps all sites through a telephone call-in system)? If not, you may be better off, cost-wise, to simply send videotapes to all sites so they can view them at their convenience. A true video conference is live and interactive!



- b) When you need audience interaction to make the subject come alive. You involve your audience in the program and, by doing so, ensure that current audience concerns and questions are discussed.
- c) When the subject is truly visual. Talking heads that go on and on, hour after hour, are BORING to watch. Unexciting, hard-to-read visuals are BORING, even frustrating! People have high expectations for television because they see so much of it in their homes. Presentations should be brief, maybe 5-7 minutes at most. A variety of formats is needed: presentations, panels, audience Q and A's, pre-produced visuals and videotapes, etc.

HOW MUCH
DOES IT
COST?

- 9) The Cost: A simple, but very professional in-house satellite video press conference at the USDA Teleconference Center can be achieved for \$3,000-\$4,000. That includes studio set-up time, production staff and facilities for the actual broadcast, microwave, uplink and satellite time. From there on, costs vary, depending on how elaborate productions are, whether or not you pick up the tab for downlinks, etc. All of this needs to be discussed, on a case-by-case basis, with the USDA Teleconference Center. There's no one, "formula" answer to the question, "What does a live, satellite videoconference cost?"

MORE
INFORMATION?

- 10) Want to learn more about videoconferencing? Contact the USDA Teleconference Center for more information.

Call: Betty Fleming
Teleconference Coordinator
(202-447-5368)

Conference Evaluation Site Facilitator's Report

Date: _____

Site: _____

Name of Site Facilitator: _____

Number of participants: _____

Activities added (not specified in site facilitator's manual). Please identify and briefly describe each:

Activities deleted:

What do you feel were the strengths of the conference?

What didn't work?

What is your perception of the way participants felt about the conference at its conclusion?

If the conference activities/materials were to be revised for future presentations, what changes would you recommend?

Conference Evaluation

Participant's Evaluation

Date: _____ Site: _____

For items 1-5, please circle the letter that best represents how you feel about each statement. Use the following key:

- SA – Strongly Agree
- A – Agree
- MA – Mildly Agree
- MD – Mildly Disagree
- D – Disagree
- SD – Strongly Disagree

- SA A MA MD D SD 1. Overall, I am glad I attended this conference.
- SA A MA MD D SD 2. I feel that I am more aware of the trends and issues in economic development.
- SA A MA MD D SD 3. I feel that I am now better able to assist my community in its economic development efforts than I was before the conference.
- SA A MA MD D SD 4. This information will have an influence on my next plan of work.
5. The following activities were a beneficial experience for me:
(Leave blank those that don't apply.)
- SA A MA MD D SD a. the first videotape segment (Defining the Problem)
- SA A MA MD D SD b. the discussion of the first videotape segment
- SA A MA MD D SD c. the second videotape segment (Approaches to Economic Development)
- SA A MA MD D SD d. the discussion of the second videotape segment
- e. the case studies:
- SA A MA MD D SD e.1. Skamania County, Washington
- SA A MA MD D SD e.2. Champaign County, Ohio
- SA A MA MD D SD e.3. Gordon County, Georgia
- SA A MA MD D SD e.4. Bedford County, Pennsylvania
- SA A MA MD D SD f. the discussion of the case studies
- SA A MA MD D SD g. the small group sessions applying economic development theory to local problems
- SA A MA MD D SD h. the audioconference
- i. local activity (please identify):
- SA A MA MD D SD i.1. _____
- SA A MA MD D SD i.2. _____
- SA A MA MD D SD i.3. _____

6. What did you like the most about the conference?

7. If this conference were to be offered again, what changes would you recommend to the conference organizers?



Economic Development for Rural Revitalization

Teleconference, May 21, 1987



Rusty Brooks

Dr. Rusty Brooks is an Extension Sociologist Economic Development at the University of Georgia. Dr. Brooks has conducted numerous community needs assessments and community surveys. He recently co-authored the development of an economic county assessment model for Georgia. His work presently involves the compilation of data as socio-economic perspectives in Georgia counties and regions.

Gordon County, GA, leaders followed all the current advise on economic development. They were encouraged to expand existing business, attract new employers, promote tourism, and soon they were very successful at this. However, the Chamber of Commerce ignored one critical component of the local economy. With the help of the Gordon County Extension office, agriculture has come full circle in Gordon County. It is now back in the mainstream of contributing to a total economic development program in Gordon County.



Phillip E. Crawford

Mr. Phillip E. Crawford is Chairman Agent for Washington State University's Skamania County Office. His educational background includes B.S. degrees in forest management and business administration and a Master of Business Administration from Oregon State University. He provides forestry educational services in a five county area along the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon. In Skamania County, Washington, he also provides educational services in community resource development, family living, and youth. During the past five years the wood products-based Skamania County economy has suffered the worst decline since the Great Depression creating unemployment as high as 30 per cent. With the assistance of campus-based resource specialists Mr. Crawford has helped local citizens define needs, develop strategies, and seek solutions. Leadership development and the establishment of an economic development council have emerged as the overriding needs.



Beth Walter Honadle

Dr. Beth Walter Honadle, National Program Leader for Economic Development with the Extension Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, provides overall leadership and guidance to the Cooperative Extension System in its educational programs to help communities create jobs, income, and high quality of life for their citizens. Her areas of responsibility include area development, business and industrial development, downtown revitalization, small business management, manpower development, impact assessment, feasibility analysis and the exploration of natural resources policy alternatives.

She is recognized nationwide as an expert in economic development and applies this knowledge in planning, organization, and giving technical assistance to broad national extension programs.



George Morse

Dr. George Morse, an Associate Professor and Extension Economist at The Ohio State University, has worked with communities on local economic development strategies for 12 years. During the last four years, he has helped 40 communities establish local business retention and expansion (R&E) programs. His educational materials on R&E have been used in a number of other states as they move into this new development strategy. This year he and Ellen Hagey, an R&E Program Consultant, are working with 20 communities to develop local programs and analyzing their survey data. This project, sponsored jointly by the Ohio Department of Development and the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, emphasizes the training of "Certified Local Coordinators" and "Certified R&E Consultants" and the use of the data for strategic planning.



Mary C. Saylor

Dr. Mary C. Saylor, is Assistant Professor of Extension in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and Arts Specialist for the Cooperative Extension Service, the College of Agriculture at the Pennsylvania State University. She is responsible for the development, implementation, and management of state wide educational programs for adults and youth with specific responsibilities for small and home based business management topics.

The Old Bedford Village project developed out of a need for employment in a severely depressed rural county in Pennsylvania, a rich cultural tradition of crafts and heritage, existing Extension program support and clientele, and a visionary county resident with an intimate knowledge of Extension's success in teaching people to help themselves.



Ron Shaffer

Dr. Ron Shaffer is a Professor of Agricultural Economics and Community Development Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His Extension responsibilities include working with community groups to build economic development strategies and understand local and nonlocal forces affecting community economic development. Part of this effort includes the development (with Glen Pulver) of a micro computer system for Community Economic Analysis. His research is on the local economic impacts of economic development, identifying types of economic development most likely to employ specific workers, and the influence commercial bank policies have on local economic development, and sources and uses of capital for new small businesses. He teaches a course for graduate students on community economic analysis.

STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING A NATIONAL AUDIOCONFERENCE USING VIDEOTAPES AND MANUALS

Step 1 (start-up)

Line up a steering committee, a cooperating institution (to serve as distribution center), and secure funding.

Identify a contact person in each State (1890 and 1862) and U.S. territory (These will be used for marketing the product, conducting the conference, and are necessary for a variety of reasons. The best way to do this is to have the Administrator-USDA sign a letter to each CES Director describing what you have planned and asking her/him to designate a State contact. Not all Directors will respond. In that case, you have a "default option" such as the State's CRD (or ANR...) leader.

Define objectives of the conference, including audience analysis and what you want to have happen (behaviorally) as a result of the conference. Outline what material you need to communicate if the objectives of the conference are to be realized. Assign responsibilities and develop a schedule with realistic deadlines for finishing each major task in the project

Tips: Get the advice of experts in multimedia educational techniques and use a professional outfit with a track record in producing high-quality tapes

Step 2 (Producing the Materials)

Following the content outline developed above, have the interdisciplinary team work on different parts of the project (e.g., writing parts of the manual, helping identify shooting locations and serving as a local arrangements committee when the film crew comes to town, etc.)

Tips: If you selected good people to work with in the beginning, you can delegate the work comfortably. However, you will have overall responsibility for seeing that each part gets done, is on time, is up to standards, doesn't duplicate others' efforts, and so on, in addition to monitoring the contractor regularly.

Step 3 (Distributing the Materials)

Several months before the materials are ready for distribution, send a letter to each of the State contacts, telling them when the materials will be ready, what the materials will consist of, and what the materials are expected to be used for. With this mailing, attach a return form requesting the following information: Name, address, phone number, electronic mail ID number; whether or not they intend to participate in audioconference; how many participants they expect (to know how many manuals to send them), and what format tape they require (1/2" VHS, etc.)

Put together a spreadsheet of the above information and prepare mailing labels of the State contacts (These labels will come in handy several times, so try to put them up on a computer.)

Send a mailing shortly before the materials are ready for distribution to confirm their intention to participate (with a registration form for the audioconference--Make them register!), doublechecking the number of participants, and so on.

Put announcements about the impending audioconference out wherever you can--Administrator's green letter, your newsletter, electronic bulletin boards, meeting announcements. Get the word out! Some States will register simply because a State specialist goes to their CRD leader asking why their State isn't participating.

Have your cooperating institution send out the materials as soon as they are ready, so that States will have plenty of time to review the materials before they actually stage the audioconference. This packet should contain the following: A cover letter from you, the videotape, the site facilitator's manual, as many participants' handbooks as they requested, another registration form (in case they still have not registered, but may want to), an order form for additional handbooks (They may look so good to them after they see the materials, that now is when they decide to sign on.) If a State had indicated previously that it would not be participating, they get the same mailing as everyone else--except that they get only one participants' handbook.

When you think you have received all of the registrations you are going to get, send a follow-up mailing to all of those State contacts that did not register stating that you want to be sure that they knew you did not have their registration. I found several States who thought they had registered and some responded to it after the third try.

After a registration form is received, send each site facilitator a mailing with : a cover (confirmation) letter stating when and where they are to call in, a teleconference tip sheet (very important for a smooth conference--tells them how it will be run, why they need to call ahead, etc.), and a sheet showing photos of your conference panelists with blurbs about their expertise.

Tip: It took six weeks for Guam to get its materials via first class mail.

Step 4 (The audioconference)

I recommend that you call on sites in turn to make the conference run smoothly. Coordinate all along with Betty Fleming in the USDA teleconference center. She is an excellent source of advice.

Tape the audioconference and have it transcribed. Summarize the key points and get back to the States with the summary. Follow-up on questions, as appropriate.

Evaluate the conference, using forms provided in the site facilitator's manual you developed.

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